

**THE EVOLUTION OF WALPOLE AS A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

**Walpole, Massachusetts**

**DePauw University**

**Off-Campus Winter Term Project**

**January 1972**

**Submitted by:**

**Margaret Jane Osterhout**

**to**

**Dr. Stanley Caine**

**Faculty Winter Term Sponsor**

## Contents

Acknowledge

Preface

### Section I: The History of the Churches of Walpole

- Map of Walpole, Massachusetts
- The Birth and Growth of Walpole and Its First Church
- The Orthodox Break
- Two Methodist Churches
- Catholicism's Arrival
- The Epiphany Church – Episcopal
- The Growth of the Protestant Churches
- Our Latest Church – The Assembly of God

### Section II: What was Happening to Walpole's Religions Outside of the Town

- Introduction
- General New England Religious and Historical Background
- The Unitarian Movement
- The Spread of Methodism
- Catholics and Episcopalians in New England

### Section III: A Few Churches Not Founded in Walpole. Why?

- Introduction
- Presbyterians
- Baptists
- Judaism
- Calvinism

Epilogue

Bibliography

### Acknowledgements

I would like to take this space to thank people who were instrumental in the reporting of this information. First, thanks goes to my two sponsors: Dr. Stanley Caine and Eugene Hartshorn who have their moral support and encouragement. Thanks to Alton Roberts who assisted with inside information and without whose previous works I would have been lost. My thanks goes to a host of others including: Frank Larrabee, Charles George, and Reverend Westover, Rick Hurst, and many others whose small comments often made important impressions. Finally, thanks goes to my parents for the grumbling they heard and mess they saw as the paper went through its different stages, and especially my mother who was so good as to proofread the copy at a time when I was proofreading and putting in the mistakes.

THANK YOU

## Preface

New England through the years has always been considered the seat of America's religion and religious efforts. The area was first settled by the Pilgrims, religious outcasts from Europe, who came to find religious freedom in the New World. They settled first in Plymouth and their settlements grew out from there. It is ironic that these people who came the long distance across the ocean to gain religious freedom were themselves so intolerant in this same aspect. They banished people who preached and believed differently from them. This continued for many years; but we can see a tremendous difference by the nineteenth century when most communities had three or more practicing religious sects.

Walpole itself was one of those towns, which continued with one religion for many years. This was Congregationalism (later becoming Unitarianism) which was and still is extremely prominent in Walpole as well as New England. It was not until the early 1800s that there was dissension in the ranks of the town members concerning doctrinal differences. Thus, the second church was set up, again a Congregational church; however, this one kept the traditional doctrines while the first church became more liberal. It was the end of the nineteenth century when the religious boom came to Walpole Center. At this time, the Methodists, Catholics, and Episcopalians arrived – and even more Congregationalists, who settled to the east and set up a new parish in what is now known as East Walpole.

It is to these people that we must credit the tolerance and religious freedom that is so much a part of our lives today. Certainly, prejudices still exist; however, they have become more resolved through the years of our country's growth. And for this heritage we should be greatly thankful. Even no religion or atheism is accepted now. Not at all like the seventeenth and eighteenth century witch trials; however, my paper cannot cover all that.

This paper is an attempt to follow the religious growth of a moderately sized New England town. What were the religious feelings of the town? When were new sects introduced and possibly why? What were the overall New England and European

movements that caused the religious growth of Walpole? Finally, there is a sampling of religions not found in Walpole and a few suggestions as to why they went elsewhere.

## **SECTION I**

### **The History of the Churches of Walpole**

**Walpole, Massachusetts – Modified from the Map in Robert's Booklet,  
Our Church and Its Ancestors**

## **Section II**

### **What was Happening to Walpole's Religions Outside of the Town**



## **Introduction**

Now that we have seen what did actually happen in Walpole, let us consider perhaps why it happened. Although chance may have had something to do with the dispersion of churches, it seems unfair and false to assume that as the only reason. The happenings of not only New England and other parts of America, but of Europe and the rest of the world, seem to have had a tremendous effect on what actually happened in Walpole. "No man is an island", said John Donne, and this seems to best describe Walpole. The people were no different from others except perhaps in location and heritage. They had similar aims, desires, habits, and spiritual needs; therefore, the church was bound to become apart. How it became apart we have seen, but why still needs to be answered.

## **General New England Religious Historical Background**

Religious intolerance was tremendous in New England until after the Revolutionary War. During this period, people were not only banished for their beliefs, but also killed. Two men who left the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of religious difficulties were Roger Williams and Thomas Hooker. Williams was banished in 1625 and went south into what is now Rhode Island and founded Providence. Hooker left in 1629 going farther southwest into what is now Connecticut. Both of these men kept what they believed in and allowed freedom with no religious persecution. The difference between them was that Williams set up a government in Providence that was completely separate from the church. This was the first of such happenings and was to be the last for well over one hundred years.

Religion continued like that known by Hooker and Williams in Massachusetts into the eighteenth century. Quakers were hung and priests were ordered imprisoned and killed. This was the era of the Mathers. Cotton and Increase Mather were great driving religious and political leaders in Boston in the late seventeenth century. Even though they were well known clergy, they caused no real change in the church of their day, but kept it

in the bounds of traditionalism. It must be remembered why there seemed to be no religious change and development in New England at this time.

These people still lived a fairly day-to-day existence. They had not way to learn of, nor even thought of, different religious ideals and practices. What home libraries they had consisted on the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Call to the Unconverted, and Serious Call to Devout and Holy Life.<sup>11</sup> All of these books contained religious overtones. They seemed to dwell on the believer and non-believer and on no distinct sect; however, in reading them you can see that people would naturally think of themselves as the believers. It can hardly be expected of these people, living in such a sheltered world, to find challenge for their religion that was what had and still did support them. It has gotten them to where they were and, therefore, could not be denied. So, it was not until the eighteenth century that any change was brought to New England in the religious realm.

The state of affairs in the early eighteenth century can be called nothing but depressing for the people of New England. They became a soul-searching people. The clergy had instilled a fear into their hearts. They were taught that in order to be a true believer and Christian, they had to have had a sign from God of His redeeming grace and be able to state when and how they had been changed in general confessions. For many people the search became so futile that they went as far as to take their own lives. It is because of this trend that revivalism had such a prominent effect on many people in New England and that the Great Awakening occurred. However, since the Great Awakening was so localized and did not really affect Walpole, it will be dwelled on only briefly here.

The Great Awakening occurred in New England in the 1740s. It was the arrival and preachings of George Whitefield that set this new era of revivalism off. He came from England where he had been a follower of John Wesley. When he came to America, he brought with him a modern approach religion. He filled parts of New England with excitement that led to renewed evangelical revivals, pentecostal outpourings, and congregational participation. I say only parts of New England because the revivalism

---

<sup>11</sup> King's Chapel Lectures, Platner, p. 38

struck a path from New York northeast into Maine and, therefore, by-passed most of eastern Massachusetts, including Walpole. One important thing that it did cause was the sharpening of religious doctrinal lines as well as the formation of hundreds of new churches. It is also obvious through Walpole's history that it caused no immediate noticeable changes in religious life of that time. However, the separation of the church into New and Old Lights was later to have an effect on Walpole.

This division was soon referred to as Separatism. The New Lights believed in more modern practices including lay preaching with some reservations. The Old Lights, on the other hand, still clung to the old traditional practices; in fact, some went as far as to accept the Anglican Church. Other Old Lights chose neither side and finally through the years became the beginning of the Unitarians that was a denomination to gain acceptance in the 1800s. With these Unitarians we see the beginnings of change to come to Walpole.

### **The Unitarian Movement**

There seem to be two causes for the division of Congregational churches in Massachusetts in the early 1800s. They were not separate causes but one usually led to the other and ultimately to the break. People were trying to work towards a more simplified, yet no less Christian, religion. When the time came for selecting a new minister, the people were often split in their decisions. What happened was that if a Unitarian preacher, such as Reverend Storer in Walpole, was chosen, the congregational section or trinitarian believers were split off to form a new church. The main reason that this had not occurred in Walpole as early as it had occurred in other towns was due to the long life of the Reverend Moray that caused the crisis to be waylaid for many years. Dedham was not as lucky, for their split came in 1818 and the town went through "a civil war that divided families, destroyed old and loyal friendships".<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Starkey, p. 175

Not only were towns divided but also education and universities were changed. Harvard took on its first Unitarian professor in 1801 so that you can see why, by the 1820s, people like these in Walpole might be noticing the change. Andover Theological Seminary (now Andover-Newton) was set up shortly thereafter to train Trinitarian ministers.

The difference in training followed the differences in doctrinal ideas. The major difference between the two was in their interpretation of the Bible. The Unitarians believed in a rational interpretation, unlike the Orthodox who viewed the Bible literally. Four major reasons why the Unitarians differed from the Orthodox were defined by William Fenn in his King's Chapel lecture of 1917. He said first that scriptures should teach simply unity and not trinity of God; secondly, the emphasis should be on the life of Jesus and his being more than a man; thirdly, that man was not completely impaired by the fall of Adam, but that his mind does have some divine elements; and finally, they believed in the idea that God would reward the good and punish the wicked.

It was stated by another lecturer at King's Chapel, John Winthrop Platner, that this period of the Unitarian movement was the ethical period. He had broken American religious history into three periods:

1. Metaphysical – the colonial era.
2. Ethical – the Unitarian movement.
3. Aesthetic – 50 years prior until his speech in 1917.

Many people have differing theories; however, most are inclined to believe that the Unitarian movement, which was almost completed by 1840, has a tremendous effect on American life, particularly in New England. Out of the 544 original Congregational churches in New England, 135 had become Unitarian and 81 Congregational churches had seceded and were left with no place to worship.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Starkey, p. 181

## **The Spread of Methodism**

We have seen how the Methodists arrived in South Walpole due to the visit of Benjamin Harris. Then later, due to the distance to the church, a new one was set up in the Center for convenience. Both churches were serviced by circuit riders for many years, which was the Methodist style, until the arrival in 1868 of the Boston Theological Seminary that later became Boston University.

Most of the Methodist's expanding, through the use of circuit riders and later camp meetings, was done on the western frontier that was then Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The Great Revival of the turn of the nineteenth century, inspired by the teachings of Bishop Francis Asbury, caused the conversion of many people. These meetings were conducted by preachers in the circuit. These preachers were at first bound to poverty and chastity. Marriage was frowned upon, but this idea did change with the times.

The circuit riders preached an evangelical religion that was less puritanical and more suited to the western lands. It was a simple religion with the belief that conversion should be supernatural. Therefore, the revivals were a popular thing. They were kept strong by two things in the early nineteenth century. First, the earthquakes of 1811 and 1812 in the Mississippi Valley that caused many conversions, and secondly, and more important, the church received just enough opposition to keep them strong yet not enough to cause them to falter or fail.

## **Catholics and Episcopalians in New England**

Catholics and Episcopalians, like other non-Congregational religious groups, were poorly tolerated for many years in New England. Both churches were associated with the Church of England and, therefore, any member was automatically considered a British sympathizer. The Episcopal Church almost became extinct during the American Revolution due to fear and hatred by the Americans. They feared that if the Episcopal Church received English backing, England would send bishops who would try to run not

only the church but also the government and politics. After the war those members still left tried to pull their church together. They had been scattered during the war and it often took many years for churches to reorganize. They sent to England for a bishop who, following the war, was better tolerated. However, even with this buildup, the Episcopal religion's growth was slowed in the middle 1800s due to an overall waning of religious enthusiasm throughout the country. Therefore, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the scattered Walpole Episcopalians gained enough courage and support to set out on their own.

Long before the war, Massachusetts had shown religious intolerance for the Catholics by passing a law in 1688 imposing the death penalty on priests. Catholics were free to live in peace in only one state, Pennsylvania, until after the Revolution. The first recognized priest in Massachusetts was accepted in order to be sent to Maine to preach to and convert the Indians there. Shortly thereafter, three resident priests were to be found in Massachusetts; however, nowhere else in New England. Maryland was where most of them found religious tolerance in the beginning of the 1800s.

However, in the 1820s, immigration began on a large scale. Every decade for the succeeding forty years, the Catholic population at least doubled. This Catholic immigration consisted mainly of Germans and Irish. The Germans were easily tolerated. They felt apart from the masses because of their language barrier and usually pushed westward away from the larger cities. The Irish, on the other hand, had left their farms and the hard times of the Irish Potato Famine. They were headed for the cities and hopefully a new life there. They considered themselves Americans and moved right in expecting to be accepted. The people they came up against were people who were establishing a new nation and who feared any outside upset, especially from a force so world renowned and powerful as the Pope and the Catholic Church. The New Englanders feared that if the Catholics got a good foothold, they might be able to assist the French in an attack from Canada.



Not only was their loyalty questioned and feared, but also their way of life. With the hordes of people arriving and staying in the port cities, overcrowding became a serious problem. They were willing and capable of working hard, but in the meantime, their living conditions and habits were less than desirable. It was because of this lack of jobs and poor conditions that Catholics finally came to Walpole to stay.

No work was considered too menial by the Irish. Work was work and it was for this reason that you found them as basic laborers. They could really be considered the building class of America. They came to Walpole to build, not on their own or for themselves, but with gangs and companies. They put through the railroads, the three lines in Walpole being finished in 1849, 1879, and 1892, and built up the area. It was a few of these men and their families who stayed in Walpole and caused the growth of the Catholic Church. However, it was not only the Irish who were responsible for this growth.

In the very late nineteenth century, immigration was still at its height. No restrictions had been made and people continued to pour into the country, this time from other areas of the globe. The Italians from their poor farming country also looked to the United States for hope and prosperity. They came in masses settling, like their predecessors, in port cities. They too found work to be in outlying areas for, at this time, Walpole and towns like her were improving their roads and laying tracks for streetcars and pipes for town-wide water systems as well as prospering in the factory type business of the Industrial Revolution. The Italians' arrival seems to be what contributed to the growth of the already large and prospering Catholic Church and what caused the need for newer and larger facilities to serve the town.

So, it can be seen that the growth of the Catholic Church in Walpole can be attributed to more than just one movement, beginning most likely with the end of the war and with the lessening of fear of outside domination. Immigration caused by the wealth and offerings of this country along with poor conditions in the old home lands was what brought people as far as the seaports. But, what brought them in was the growth of the

small town industries and, likewise, the need for cheap, hard laborers to get the jobs done.



### **SECTION III**

#### **A Few Churches Not Found in Walpole – Why?**

## **Introduction**

The question can be brought up as to why these were the only churches ever to enter and establish themselves in Walpole. Nowadays, with travel so simple, it is easy enough to travel a few miles to surrounding communities on Sunday, but in those days, the same distances seemed greater. So, that could not be the only reason that so many prominent religions never came specifically to Walpole. The Baptists came to surrounding towns in the early nineteenth century; why not Walpole? Jews surround Walpole, but never came to live and worship here; and what about Calvinists? You begin to wonder if Walpole still has laws forbidding others. Yet, with the new Assembly of God, you can see that this at least is no longer true. I have chosen only a few of the more prominent and well-known religions because of simplicity and space. To go into any more would be too time consuming and with the four presented, and overall view will be given.

## **Presbyterians**

A very well known church to many people is the Presbyterian Church. The main reason why they were not found in Walpole and the surrounding area, in general, is due to their similarity to the Congregationalists. These two churches had a hard time getting along together in New England due to Congregational domination, but on the western frontier, they worked together. When a new town was started, the people could choose between the two religions and only one church was started. A reason why the Presbyterian Church was more prominent in the West was because it was better suited for the less civilized western living than the Congregational Church.

## **Baptists**

The Baptists had been a driving force in the Great Awakening. Even though they had not people among the leaders, it was with their support that the movement spread. Perhaps it is because the Baptists were so involved with the Great Awakening, which did

not affect Walpole, that they never became established in Walpole. Walpole was still very small at that time and still trying to get on its feet.

In the eighteenth century, the group of New Lights who had become established during the Great Awakening was turning towards the Baptist religion. The Baptists worked towards three main goals:

1. Religious tolerance and freedom.
2. Growth in education – Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.
3. Missionary work both at home and abroad.

In the 1840s, Baptists again started to grow. In what is now the neighboring town of Norwood, a Baptist church was founded. Other towns also have Baptist churches; however, not Walpole. As has been noted before, Walpole was in the middle of tremendous religious turmoil. Dedham had already survived that as far back as 1818, so they now had a more open mind towards religion. Walpole's people had just been split over the Unitarian question less than twenty years prior. If the idea of a new sect has been brought forth in 1845, it would have been easily disposed of. Also, the people of Walpole were just beginning their break with tradition and were at no point to go further. It would take the arrival of a sect that had been in the area, like Methodism, to break the trend.

Nowadays, with the number of Baptist churches in the area and with the ease of travel, a Baptist church in Walpole seems out of the question for the time being.

### **Judaism**

The Jewish people of New England were and still are considered businessmen. In older pre-American days, they were the moneylenders of ancient Venice. Whatever their job, they were always a proud people eager to gain the best in life and succeeding.

The Jews of nineteenth and twentieth century Massachusetts normally worked in the big businesses in the cities and particularly in Boston. However, they, like most city

workers, were not satisfied. They wished the benefits of big city work without the drawbacks of city living. So they moved outside and to the country.

Why not Walpole? Well, Walpole in the beginning was a bit too far out, so they settled in Waban and Newton to the west. As the suburban limits pressed further out, Walpole was still by-passed. It was by-passed again for the reasons of comfort and convenience. Walpole had poorer transportation than most towns in the area. Other towns, like Sharon, were where the Jews headed. There they had Boston public transportation, a resort lake, and later a tuberculosis sanitarium for their ill. It is interesting to note that the Jewish took advantage of towns ever farther distant than Walpole, but not for permanent residences. They often spent their summers on farms in these more rural areas. No matter what they were looking for, Walpole was not the town with it.

### Calvinism

Finally, a religion that is not that well known today, but that was prominent in these early years was Calvinism. Although it has not been mentioned, it was extremely important and an integral part of the New England religions of the nineteenth century. At this time, there were two different Calvinistic sects and a liberal group associated with the religion. The two sects were the Moderate Calvinists and the Consistent Calvinists. The Moderates believed that God was sovereign but that man was free and responsible for his acts. The Consistents believed in and preached of God's absolute sovereignty and man's helplessness. They also believed that even a bad thought is immoral whether acted out or not. It was these Consistent Calvinists who were also the right wing of New England Congregationalism. It was there people that George Whitefield capitalized on during his preachings. The third group, the liberals, were the left wing of New England Congregationalism and, in turn, rejected all Calvinistic ideas.

So, it can be seen that although not well publicized, the Calvinists' ideas were a behind-the-scenes activator of religions throughout New England.

## Epilogue

It can be seen that religion was and still is an integral part of New England Society. New England has always been an important religious center and to study it leaves a vast opening for opportunity. Religion has gone through a tremendous development from the days of the witch trials to the freedom and tolerance of today. It has had both its ups and downs, surges and back-slidings. Like any universal idea or organization, it has been praised and accused; has been helpful; and has put its force in at the wrong time and place. Out of it has come a striving force of people in all walks of life and all denominations who are pushed onward by a belief in some higher being. It is for this reason that there is such great interest in studying it. It is ever changing, ever moving, and world encompassing, a field that is ever the same yet rarely becomes stagnant. It is an interest all should have no matter what their denominational belief.

## Bibliography

### Books

Armstrong, Marjorie M. and O. K. Armstrong, The Indomitable Baptists: A Narrative of their Role in Shaping American History. Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967.

DeLue, William, The Story of Walpole – 1724-1924. Ambrose Press, Inc. Norwood, Massachusetts, 1925.

Ferguson, Charles W., Organizing to Beat the Devil: Methodists and the Making of America. Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1971.

Gaustad, Edwin Scott, The Great Awakening in New England. Harper and Brothers, New York, New York, 1957.

Goen, ----, Revivalism and Separatism in New England, found in the DePauw Library.

Jameson, J. Franklin, Dictionary of United States History – 1492-1898. Puritan Publishing Company, Boston, 1897.

King's Chapel Lectures, The Religious History of New England. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1917.

Lewis, Issac Newton, A History of Walpole, Massachusetts. First Historical Society of Walpole, Massachusetts, 1905.

Maynard, Theodore, The Story of American Catholicism. The MacMillan Company, New York, New York, 1843.

Miller, Perry, Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition. Atheneum, New York, New York, 1962.

Sperry, ----, Religion in America, found in the DePauw Library.

Starkey, Marion, The Congregational Way. Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1966.

Sweet, William Warren, The Story of Religion in America. Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, New York, 1939 and 1950.

Wedda, John, New England Worships. Random House Company, New York, New York, 1965.

Booklets and Pamphlets.

Belcher, Roy S. Jr., editor, The Village Church – 1846-1971. United Methodist Church, South Walpole, Massachusetts, 1971.

“Brief Sketch of King’s Chapel”, Boston, Massachusetts, obtained from the Walpole Historical Society.

Dupee, James A., “The Ministry of Reverend John Parker Boyd Storer, at Walpole, Massachusetts 1926-1839”, 1855, obtained from the historical records of the United Church of Christ in Walpole, Massachusetts.

“Epiphany Church, Walpole, Massachusetts: A History of the Parish on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Laying of the Cornerstone, 1895-1945”, obtained from Mr. Charles George.

“A History of the Blessed Sacrament Parish of Walpole, Massachusetts 1874-1949”, 1949, obtained from the historical records of the United Church of Christ in Walpole, Massachusetts.

Lewis Farm – A New England Saga, pages 105-125, “The Church” and “Calvin Plimpton”, these were the only chapters found and they were obtained from the historical records of the United Church of Christ in Walpole, Massachusetts.

“Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Service of Samuel Allen as the Clerk of the Orthodox Congregational Society 1898”, obtained from the historical records of the United Church of Christ in Walpole, Massachusetts.

Roberts, Alton C., Our Church and its Ancestors. Rea-Craft Press, Inc., Foxboro, Massachusetts, 1962.

“Seventy-Five Years: A History of the Union Congregational Church”, East Walpole, Massachusetts, 1952. Obtained from Mr. Frank R. Larrabee, historian of the Union Congregational Church, East Walpole, Massachusetts.



# The Succession of Churches

**Note** – Rev. George Phillips of Watertown was a great-grandfather of Rev. Phillips Payson of Walpole, MA

Watertown First Church – 1630  
Gathered – July 30, 1630  
1. Rev. George Phillips (died on July 1, 1644)

Dedham First Church – 1637  
Parish set apart – September 10, 1636  
Gathered – November 8, 1638  
1. Rev. John Allen – 1673-1685  
2. Rev. William Adams – 1673-1685  
3. Rev. Joseph Belcher – 1693-1723  
4. Rev. Samuel Dexter – 1724-1755

**Note** – The settlers of “Contentment”, later called Dedham, came up the Charles River in canoes or boats from Watertown. So the Watertown Chrch was the Mother Church of Dedham, as Dedham became the Mother Church of Walpole, Norwood, Westwood, and Dover.

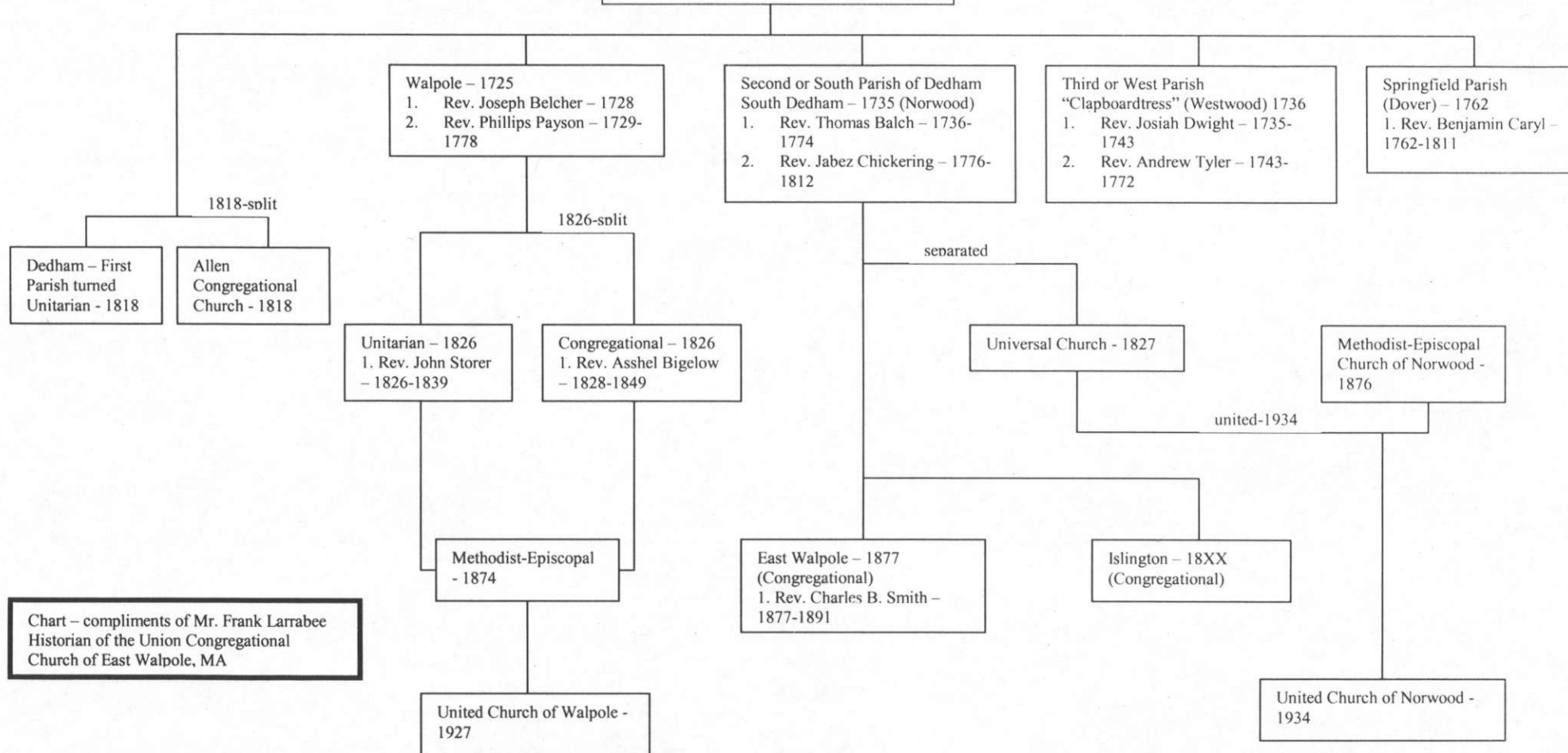


Chart – compliments of Mr. Frank Larrabee  
Historian of the Union Congregational  
Church of East Walpole, MA



## **The Birth and Growth of Walpole and Its First Church**

Walpole was settled in 1659, less than forty years after the landing of the Pilgrims. It seems to have been settled for the use of the natural resources in the area. Virgin forests stood throughout the entire area and the river was swift. Both of these natural resources were conducive to the starting of a saw mill. This is, in fact, what this area was known as for many years.

The people who lived at the Saw Mill were religious people typical of the settlers of the day. They lived under the governing of Dedham, a town approximately ten miles distant to the north. To Dedham they paid their taxes, traveled to for town meetings and traveled to on Sunday for worship. Ten miles, ten minutes you may think; but think again. How fast can two oxen or two plow horses travel hauling a farm wagon filled with people? It must have taken these settlers close to four hours to get to worship on Sundays and another four to return. It is no wonder that these people began examining other alternatives. They really had no attachment to the Dedhamites. There wee of different geographical, social, and heritage backgrounds.

Quite a few of the townspeople started attending religious services in Medfield, a mere five miles distant, a two-hour ride. Now they met their first obstacle. Being weekly attendants of the Medfield church, they were expected to contribute financial support for payment of the minister. This meant that the people of the Saw Mill were paying for the support of two ministers and two churches, Being citizens of the town of Dedham, they were obliged to pay the parish tax because of the closeness of church and state in those early years. The parish tax often times was the only tax the town has and the church in Massachusetts usually included the government of the town. The town of Dedham did make a concession and accepted two-thirds of the Saw Mill's taxes leaving the other one-third of the payment to go to Medfield. This was a compromise that really satisfied neither party, least of all the inhabitants of the Saw Mill who made their first plea for township in 1721.

This attempt was an inspiration to other people in the Dedham area who were in a similar predicament. The people of "Clavebordtrees", in the same year, attempted an unsuccessful break with Dedham for similar reasons. Now, realizing they were not the only people with such problems, the people of the Saw Mill area continued their quest for independence. In 1722, they were freed from paying taxes to the town of Dedham. This was a relief, since by this practically no one worshipped there. Meanwhile, the Dedham government set up a committee to consider the conditions of the Saw Mill people. As with many committees appointed today, nothing was accomplished; and it was not until 1724 that the question was brought up in Dedham again. On May 15, 1724, the town of Dedham gave assent for the new township. The proposition was sent to the State and then again was sent to committee. However, this committee seemed to accomplish more. After five months of debating, on November 27, 1724, the committee submitted to the council their suggestions. They read, in part, as follows: "...They be Sett off as a Distinct & Separate Precinct & Vested with such Powers and Privileges as by Law are Allowed to other Precincts..."<sup>1</sup> There were, however, conditions put to the people of the area, as follows: "the Inhabitants of Said Precinct be Obligated within eighteen Months of their Charge to Build & Finish a Suitable House for the Publik Worship of God... That they Proved as Soon as May be a Learned Orthodox Minister to Preach the Gospel to them... That they Procure a School Master to Instruct their Youth in Writing & Reading..."<sup>2</sup> The Council and the House discussed the committee's suggestions and after a long debate, an appeal by the House won. On December 4, the bill was changed to read: "An Act for Dividing the Town of Dedham, and Erecting a New Town by the Name of Walpole."<sup>3</sup>

Most of the new towns founded in this era had broken away from their original ties because of the distance of the meeting house and religious services from their outlying areas. Now, acting as a separate distinct town, Walpole could choose its own minister and place of its services. The first preacher Walpole had was a 1723 graduate of Harvard, the Reverend John Belcher. He arrived almost a year later and was brought in

---

<sup>1</sup> DeLue, P. 59

<sup>2</sup> DeLue, P. 59

<sup>3</sup> DeLue, P. 61

for a four-month term to be paid by "free Contributions".<sup>4</sup> In the Spring, as his term came to an end, the people of Walpole, following discussions with the clergy of neighboring towns, decided to ask him to stay. He was offered a good salary for the day as well as a bonus that was to include any loose money collected. It was not until an increase was made that he finally accepted. During the next year after his reinstatement, something must have happened in the parish because a year later the town was seeking to dismiss him. It is known at this time the reason for this dissatisfaction, but it is assumed that financial problems were the real cause of the problem.

So, by 1729, the people of Walpole were in their second search for a minister. It was to be their last search for quite a long time. Their choice was the Reverend Phillip Payson, a Harvard graduate of 1724. He received thirty votes over seven for his closest competitor. This helps us to estimate the population of the town at this time since only the men had voting power. Payson was well loved by the people and spend his entire career working in Walpole until his death in 1778. During his time of service many changes came to Walpole. Payson first brought in a revolutionary idea. In 1730, he organized the church to be separate from the town's government and politics. He set up a governing body in the church with deacons as lay leaders. The first Annual Meeting of the church was held in 1734. During this meeting, it was suggested that the Sabbath Day collection should be paid by all parishioners and be used in payment of their minister.

Meanwhile, in 1732, the Reverend Payson bought his own home for the family he was starting. This was the first parsonage, quite a different arrangement from today when most clergy are provided with a home and many other benefits. The people did provide wood for their ministers. In 1738, quite a bit more than eighteen months following their founding, the meeting house was appropriate for the day with family pews. These pews were built by the different families so that uniformity was lost. In fact, some of the pews had sides on them so high that the occupants could not look out that also meant that the minister could never tell how many people actually heard his three- and four-hour sermons, and how many slept.

---

<sup>4</sup> DeLue, p. 95

The Reverend Payson's years as minister were relatively free from disputes and problems. Yet, as Payson got older, the town's ideas began to change whereas the minister's ideas may not have. In 1772, the town voted to put a seat in the pulpit for Payson was nearing 70 and aging quickly. In 1775, there was a disagreement as to his salary. Whether this was due to the war or the inabilities of Payson, we may never know. His salary was finally lowered and in 1778, the revered pastor died. For five years, Walpole's first church had interim pastors. After those five years, another Harvard graduate entered into the history of Walpole. He was the Reverend George Morey. In the same year that Morey arrived, the people decided that due to increasing size, a new meeting house was needed. It had only been forty-five years since the first meeting house has been completed. They planned on using the same materials and location, and wanted to rebuild and enlarge it.

Reverend Morey was what could possibly be considered a peculiar member of his profession. He seemed to run the town that really was not peculiar of the clergy in those days. The people appropriated money for the straightening of his street and lined it with fences due to his wishes. He wore flashy clothing and carried a cane in his later years, which he often used on the youth. It seems important at this point to explain a possible reason for the town's actions. To the people of those days, the minister had a key to heaven. These people were extremely religious and no one ever considered doubting religion as it was in that day. Religion to them might save them from Hell, the most highly feared thing in this world or beyond. Morey seemed to take advantage of this power and used it for his own gain as did many ministers of the day.

After forty years of service, his parishioners voted to relieve him of his duties. They disliked his Calvinistic language. Their only problem lay with the tenure previously awarded him that stated that he would be employed by the church and town until his death. He did continue for over a decade until 1826. Following his release, a successor was sought. This successor proved to cause the split in the first parish church of Walpole. This fateful man was the Reverend John Parker Boyd Storer.

## The Orthodox Break

To many people who still believed in the Trinity, a Unitarian-bent minister was not what they had in mind. Storer was a graduate of Bowdoin College and Harvard Theological School that by this time had a faculty made up of a majority of Unitarians. With this as a background, a few parishioners, even though they had never heard the man preach, asked permission to establish an Orthodox Congregational Society. Before permission was granted, on November 13, 1836, they organized. The group consisted of four men and twenty-five that later brought rude comments to bear upon the church.

It is also conjecture now that theology may not have been the main or single reason for the split. It is possible that it occurred because the loyal Morey followers were enraged at the salary increase to be paid to this new minister. The fact that this would be more of a financial burden to the people cannot be borne out because, as members of the Congregational Orthodox Society, they were doing what their ancestors had revolted against. They were paying for the support of two churches and attending only one because "every person liable to pay a town tax was also liable to pay a parish tax"<sup>5</sup> that went to the first parish church (Unitarian).

This split was not only important in a religious way, but because of it, the town was split for many years. Friendships were broken. Anyone belonging to the Orthodox Church could not gain enough votes to be elected to a town office and the taxation a problem to be settled by the courts. The first minister of the Orthodox Congregational Church was the Reverend Asahel Bigelow. Even he was taxed for the support of Reverend Storer until the Reverend returned Bigelow's money. He could not condone being paid by this other minister. From this point on, the two ministers became the best of friends. They worked diligently together to try to bring peace back to the town. Through their strivings, progress was made. In 1833, Massachusetts adopted a law establishing religious freedom throughout the United States. So, these two ministers were pioneers in

---

<sup>5</sup> Allen, p. 2



their field in Massachusetts and the conversion of Massachusetts was the end of a many year struggle towards religious freedom.

In 1827, the church had attained land and had built a meeting house or house of worship. They dedicated it this same year to the Triune God.

### **Two Methodist Churches**

As we shall see later, Methodism had grown rapidly in both England and America. In Walpole, a Methodist Society was first formed in South Walpole in 1822. Four years prior, in 1818, Methodism had been introduced by the Reverend Benjamin Harris who had come to Walpole to transact some business. Since he was going to be in South Walpole for quite a few weeks, he suggested to his friends that they have a religious meeting once a week. When the people found out he was a Methodist, they became quite cold towards Harris and his meetings, but the meetings continued and in time interest grew. They were conducted in private homes and people often stayed for the night. In 1820, the Annual Methodist Conference set up this church under the direction of the Mansfield Circuit. It was not until 1830 that the first parish house was erected. By this time Methodism was well accepted by the people of the area. The parish was erected on the Post Road, the major traveled route between Boston and Providence. Beside and across the street from the church stood two noted taverns well used by travelers since Walpole was located halfway between the two cities. With the constant bevy of travelers the church's congregation grew and in 1845 a decision was made to build a new church. The present church was built the next year in 1846. Not only was the increased congregation due to travelers, but many businesses in the area were growing, bringing new people into the area. Although the employers rarely attended church, they encouraged their employees to attend that did increase attendance.

While attendance grew in South Walpole, there came to Walpole Center a few Methodists. They found that the three mile trip to South Walpole was too far, so in 1873 with the help of the South Walpole church, a Society of Methodists was begun in the

Center. The next year, they were formally organized as the Walpole Methodist-Episcopal Church. To be a church, they needed a pastor and for several years they attained assistance and service of the preacher from South Walpole. In 1875, they began receiving the weekend services of senior divinity school students. These men would travel by train from Boston on Friday, spend the entire weekend ministering to the needs of the church, and return to a week of classes on Monday morning. For this service, they received from between four and eight dollars per week as well as train fare.

The Methodist Church fared poorly in Walpole Center, never having a large congregation; however, they could be proud in the fact that all present were devoted. In 1927, as we shall see, the Methodists joined with the Congregationalists and with the Unitarian Church (formerly the first parish) to form the United Church of Christ.

### **The South Walpole Methodist Church**

### **Catholicism's Arrival**

During the first two hundred years of settlements in New England, the Congregational Church dominated the religious life of the people. Catholicism was introduced, particularly with immigrants. The first Catholics recorded as living in Walpole were eight adults and three children who were French Acadian charges assigned to Walpole in 1756. They never set up a permanent church. They lived through public charity, being sick and illiterate in English, until they banded together with others of their people to walk North to their own land. The next immigrants are assumed to have arrived in the 1830s. They were transient men who lived very unstable lives. Different priests visited Walpole during these years to hold services for the Catholics. In the 1840s, the Walpole Catholics, now made up mostly of Irish immigrant workers, became a mission of the church of Boston. Following the Civil War, the Walpole parish became the charge of Father Phillip Gillick from North Attleboro. It was he who set up the regular church services in Walpole. With a redivision of diocese in the area, in 1872, Father Gillick was replaced by Father Francis Gouesse.

### **Saint Francis' Church – 1876-1912**

Father Gouesse worked out of Foxboro until their parish house was finished at which time he moved to Walpole. He used different places for worship until he was able to purchase land just east of the center of town. It was here in 1874 that Father Gouesse first broke ground for the Saint Francis Church. The building of the church was a parish



project, for money was lacking and man-hours in work were more easily attained. In 1879, the entire church structure had been completed; all needed now was to finish furnishing it, and complete the rectory. In these thirty years, Father Gouesse's church has grown from a dozen families to almost three hundred fifty.<sup>6</sup>

It is through the memories of the permanent residents of a town that we gain the most interesting daily life stories of the town. An older member of the town recalled for me a few interesting personal facts concerning Father Gouesse. It seems that the Father's ministry in Walpole may not have been as smooth as the histories' report. It must be noted that he was a Frenchman and European educated. The people he ministered to were Americans of Irish background and it seems that they were none too pleased to be preached to by a Frenchman. A habit that often infuriated his Irish congregation was that Father Gouesse went once a week to Boston for a day in order to partake of the beverages of the local establishments. He inevitably returned to Walpole completely inebriated, much to the disgust of his parish.

Upon the death of Father Gouesse in 1901, the Reverend Daniel Riley was appointed to Walpole as its second pastor. By this time, the parish families were, as follows: "Irish, 324; French, 28; Italian, 9; Portuguese, 1. There were 150 English speaking Canadians."<sup>7</sup> During Father Riley's pastorate, Walpole's Catholic population began to increase markedly, as we shall see later, due to growing industries. It seemed obvious to him that the church would have to be enlarged or replaced. It was decided to replace it on the same sight. Saint Francis' Church was moved back and on April 23, 1913, the new church was dedicated as the Blessed Sacrament Church of Walpole. In 1906, Father Riley has purchased land in South Walpole for a burial ground that still retains the names of the first church, which was torn down, Saint Francis' Cemetery.

In 1919, it was again obvious that the parish had grown. At this time, services were begun in East Walpole for the convenience of the eastern parishioners. It was to be

---

<sup>6</sup> History of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, Section 5.

<sup>7</sup> History of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, Section 4.

a mission church of Walpole with a chapel dedicated in 1927. However, in 1931, East Walpole was set apart from the original church. This move distressed many of the Catholics; however, progress was essential.

### **The Epiphany Church – Episcopal**

The last religious group until recently was organized as the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1886. Prior to that time members of this faith had worshiped in other organized churches in the town. By the end of that year, plans were made to establish a mission from Canton in Walpole. The first pastor was the Reverend Albert E. George and he held the first regular service in 1887. Services were held in different halls for the next decade. In 1894, the missions of Walpole and Norwood were united only to be separated in 1907. In 1895, the cornerstone for the Episcopal Church was laid. It was now, and still is, called the Epiphany Church, named after the same season in the Christian year. Many people seemed to be under the assumption that it was the Saint Mark's Episcopal Church. Whatever its original name, it prospered and is still an integral part of Walpole today.

### **The Growth of the Protestant Churches**

In 1877, a Congregational Society was formed in East Walpole, two and a half miles from its counterpart in Walpole Center. For years, these people of Walpole had continued to travel north to Dedham and later to Norwood for their religious worship. They organized and met in a hall in East Walpole provided by the Honorable Francis Bird. In 1880, they asked to be recognized, and were, by the area towns including Walpole and Dedham. In 1881, they were admitted to membership in the Massachusetts Suffolk South Conference.<sup>8</sup> A church building was built between 1882 and 1883, and the church has since prospered. It is now known as the Union Congregational Church of East Walpole.

---

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, p. 179

During these same years, the churches in the Center were well organized and surviving on their own; however, people had begun to evaluate their situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. It had been almost one hundred years since the religious split caused by the Reverend Storer that had shaken the town and the people were reevaluating their beliefs. It should be noted, also at this time, that the Methodist Church that had never been a very large parish was fast dying. The Unitarian Church, on the other hand, was the parish "of the rich", yet even with all their money, they had no minister and had to accept the services of the Medfield minister. It seems ironic that it was the Congregationalists, the group that had been forced to move out of their original church years earlier, that were prospering. They had a large congregation and a minister, but very little money. So, in the 1902s, committees were set up on all sides for a merger. Many years later, snide comments were made concerning the merger. One of these was that the Congregationalists had the people, the Unitarians the money, and the Methodists had the religion.

There were three important points concerning the merger that were essential. These were:

- "1. A declaration of faith for the new church.
2. The government of a united church.
3. Church construction and funds."<sup>9</sup>

They drew up a statement of faith that covered the governing and left the third point for later discussions.

With the merger becoming final, the Methodist Conference was enraged to think that their people would allow such a thing to happen. All but a few Methodists had simply withdrawn their membership and joined the others. Those few had elected to go to the Methodist Church in South Walpole. The Conference never had (and probably never will) mention their black sheep band of followers in Walpole, even though they existed and were recognized for over fifty years. So, in 1927, the merger was completed. A name had yet to be decided on. The Congregationalists and Unitarians wished to keep names

---

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, p. 35

similar to their backgrounds; however, for some reason unknown to this day, the church was formed and still continues as the United Church of Christ in Walpole.

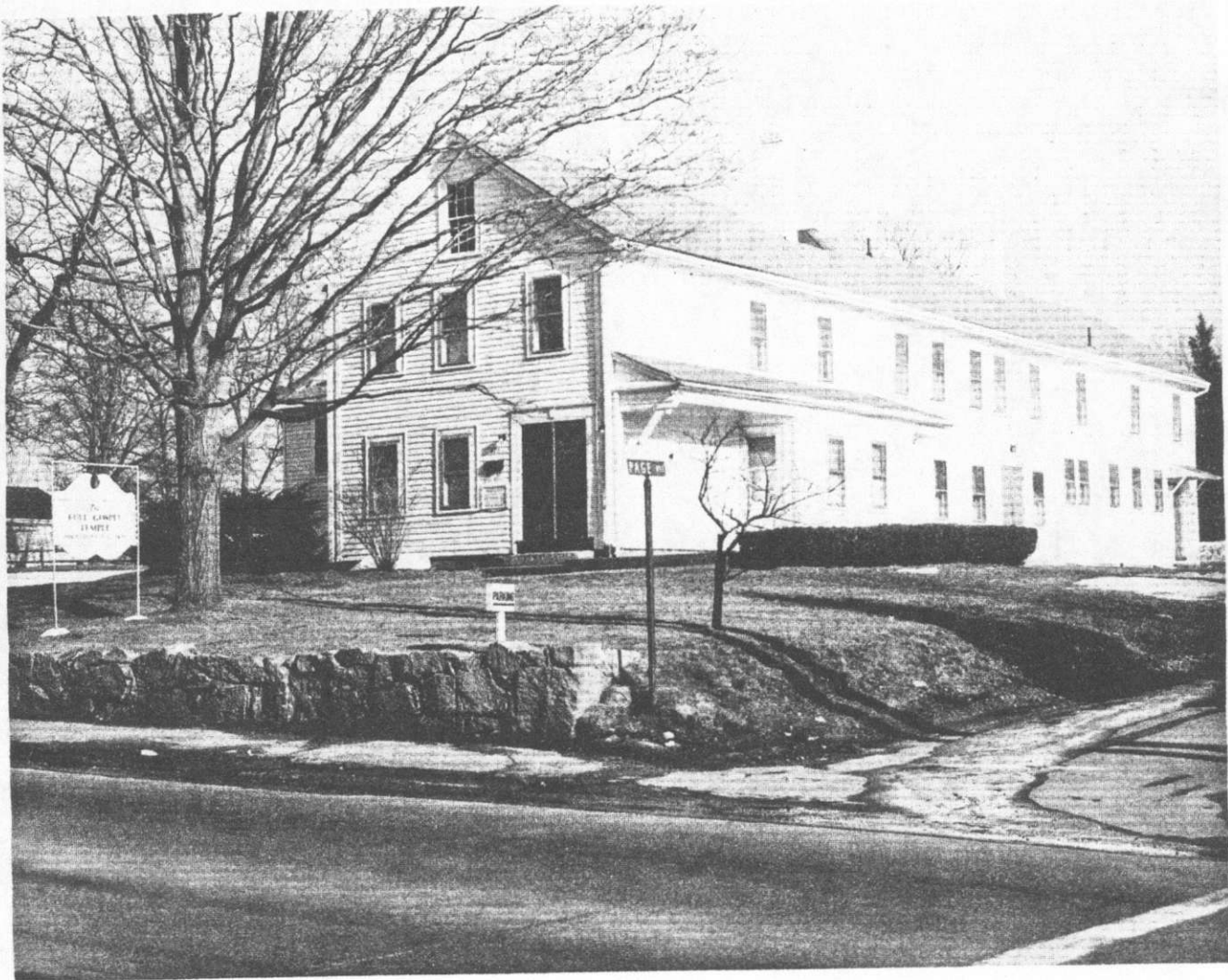
The Succession of Churches<sup>10</sup>

### **Our Latest Church – The Assembly of God**

The Assembly of God is a Pentecostal type of church that was started in Walpole in 1965. Three families, who had been attending the church in Quincy, Massachusetts, decided to move to, and live, in Walpole. The church has grown slowly since as can be seen in that now, seven years later, there are fifty-two members. However, it seems important to me that New Englanders who are supposed to be so traditional and set in their ways have accepted this church. It is making out fairly well for a church whose denomination began less than seventy years ago in competing with churches with the histories of those around it.

---

<sup>10</sup> Compliments of Mr. Frank Larrabee, historian of the Union Congregational Church



**THE FULL GOSPEL TEMPLE, Main Street, Walpole, Est. 1968**





**WALPOLE ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH, Corner of East and School Streets, Walpole, Est. 1967**



**CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE, Main Street, Walpole, Est. 1968**

# Churches

## THE FULL GOSPEL CHURCH

The Full Gospel Church is at 429 Main Street, Walpole.

Church school for children and adults of all ages on Sundays at 10:00 a.m.; morning worship service at 11:00 a.m.; evening praise and worship at 7:00 p.m. Nursery services are provided for each of these services. A Tuesday night Bible study group meets at the church at 7:30 p.m.

The Full Gospel Church is an interdenominational church which is charismatic in its form of worship and evangelical in its teaching. The church is affiliated with, and actively supports the "700 Club" seen on channel 25.

Pastor W.J. Hankins, an ordained minister for over 30 years, founded the church on Easter Sunday, April 14, 1968. The church was located first in Norwood, but the congregation outgrew the facilities there and in September 1976, moved into the present facilities at 429 Main Street. Construction of a new sanctuary seating approximately 400 and fellowship hall which will be joined to the present building is underway.

The Full Gospel Church has an active teaching ministry that includes Sunday School classes for children of all ages and several adult classes. Teachers are trained and have an awareness of the needs of particular age groups. The staff includes some that have been trained for and have experience in public school teaching.

The teaching of the church is well-rounded, giving individuals and families principles from the Bible that help them to handle problems of everyday life.

The pastoral staff of the Full Gospel Church is well trained and available to those who desire physical healings. They are happy to share with those in need that, "with God, all things are possible."

For more information, call 668-1828 or 668-6519.

## CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

The Church of the Nazarene, 45 Main Street, has services Sunday at 11 a.m. and a Bible study Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. (7:00 p.m. during July and August). Church school is held Sunday at 10 a.m. A nursery is provided for parents attending services. There are church school classes for children and adults. Outreach ministries include prayer fellowships for smokers, drinkers, overweight, divorcees, food pantry for the poor, clothing box for the poor, nursing home ministries, counseling (personal, marriage, family), weekday Bible studies and interracial ministries.

For more information, call 668-6474 or 668-9280.

## ST MARY'S CHURCH

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in East Walpole has masses on Saturdays at 4 p.m. and Sundays at 7:30, 9, 10:15 and 11:30 a.m. Weekday masses are at 9 a.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. Saturdays. A mass is held at 5:30 p.m. on the eve of holy days and 7 and 9 a.m. and 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. on holy days. Confessions heard from 3-4 and 7:30-8 p.m. Saturdays. Baptisms are held the second Sunday of each month. The Rev. William J. Burns is pastor.

The CCD religious education coordinator is Sister Marinus O'Brien: 668-6853.

For more information, call 668-1828.



# UNITED CHURCH IN WALPOLE

Organised  
October 25, 1927



AGREEMENT OF ASSOCIATION  
BY-LAWS  
LIST OF MEMBERS

JANUARY 1, 1928  
WALPOLE, MASSACHUSETTS

*Betty Cottrell*

# MANUAL

BY THE

Orthodox Congregational Church

WALPOLE, MASS.

# A Service

Commemorating the Ministry of

Rev. Phillips Payson

One of the Early Ministers  
of Walpole

With by the  
First Parish and the Second Congregational Churches.  
Sunday, June 3, 1904

On the  
173rd Anniversary of the Preaching of his First Sermon  
in Walpole, June 8, 1729

*Betty Cottrell*

# Epiphany Church

(INCORPORATED 1897)

Walpole, Massachusetts



A History of the Parish  
on the  
Fiftieth Anniversary  
of the  
Laying of the Cornerstone

1895-1945

